

NEWS RELEASE

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DeNUCCI SAYS MBTA SHOULD PAY FOR HIGHWAY FUNDS DIVERTED TO BIG DIG

State Auditor Joe DeNucci, in a report issued today, urged the Big Dig to seek reimbursement from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) for \$6.9 million in state highway funds that were improperly diverted to the project for design of a rail link between Boston's North and South Stations that may never be built.

The North/South Rail Link proposal calls for construction of an underground railroad connection beneath the depressed Central Artery corridor that would connect the two stations, which are about a mile apart but have no direct mass transit link. To date, the link has not been built, and whether it will remain an open question.

DeNucci said the highway funds should not have been diverted to the Central Artery project because the North-South Rail Link is a non-highway project. He said the Big Dig should recover the funds from the MBTA because the T is the primary beneficiary of the rail plan.

Although project officials said they wanted to maintain a potential rail link as an environmental commitment, DeNucci noted that the state's Secretary of Environmental Affairs rejected the rail link as a Big Dig environmental mitigation cost, stating that the plan is "at worst impossible and at best impracticable" from an engineering standpoint, that there would be relatively little demand for the service, and that the proposal would be too costly.

DeNucci's audit also reported that the Big Dig's indecision over a design issue resulted in a 20-month delay that cost \$4.5 million. The dispute centered over two options for construction of the rail tunnel. Although a management consultant voiced concerns about the high cost of one of the options, the project wasted time and money by continuing to weigh both options before making a decision to go with the less costly one.

Throughout this process, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rejected federal assistance to the rail link project because it was not part of the Central Artery project.

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DeNucci said that although the North-South Rail Link may be well intentioned, its high cost – and the refusal of the federal government to participate financially – makes it uncertain that the plan will ever move forward

“The Big Dig should vigorously seek reimbursement of the \$6.9 million in state highway funds from the MBTA,” DeNucci said.

In response, Big Dig officials said they have submitted this recommendation to the MBTA for its review.

